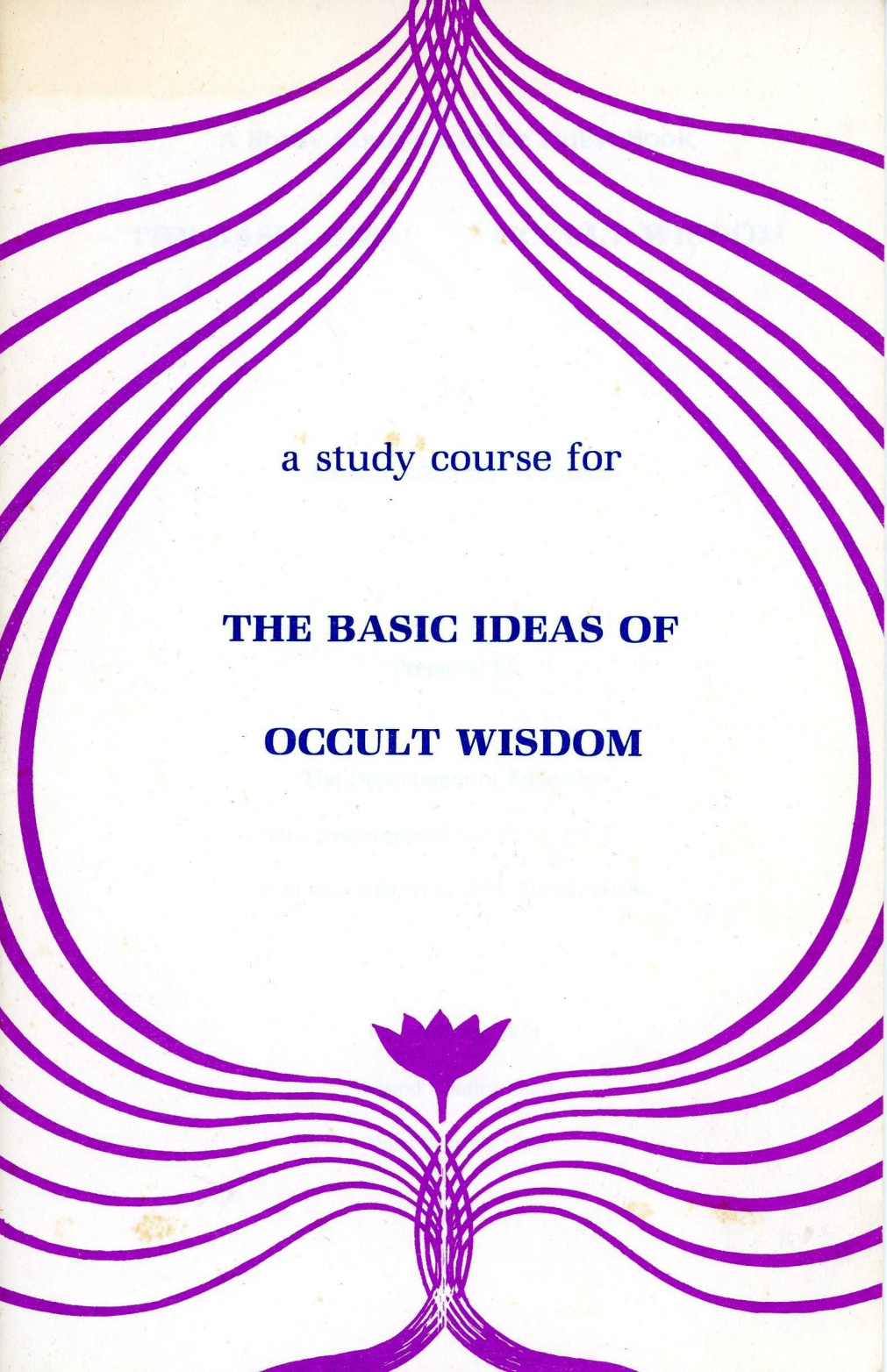

a study course for

THE BASIC IDEAS OF

OCCULT WISDOM

A Study Course for the Quest Book

THE BASIC IDEAS OF OCCULT WISDOM

by

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PREFACE

This is an introductory study course in the basic ideas of the Occult Wisdom called Theosophy. Its purpose is not to give a mass of facts and information, but to help those beginning to study Theosophy to become familiar with and develop an understanding of its basic ideas or principles. In addition to giving a basic comprehension of the essential ideas of the Divine Wisdom, it is hoped that the course will provide a framework of understanding with which to pursue further the study of Theosophy.

Each student using this correspondence course proceeds at his or her own pace. After you have read and studied the chapter in the book, answer the questions for that chapter as fully as you can and in your own words. It will be very helpful to your study to consult other books or the references given on the subject so that you may get a fuller and deeper understanding of the ideas. The answers to the questions at the end of each chapter, along with any other questions that you may have, should be forwarded to your correspondence course advisor. Feel free to ask your advisor any questions that occur to you when you read each chapter. Such an exchange can be helpful to you. It is frustrating to study alone and not have someone to ask questions of at the moment they arise. Your advisor will then answer any questions that you have, read the written answers you have submitted, and make such comments as may further aid your study. You then proceed on to the next chapter.

Most of the books listed as references are in print and may be purchased from the Theosophical Publishing House, P. O. Box 270, Wheaton, Illinois 60189. Books may be borrowed from the Olcott Library and Research Center if you take a correspondence course, or if you are a library member or theosophical member. The Olcott Library is our National Library at the Theosophical Society in America, and is unusual in that it handles a great many books for loan through the mail instead of providing them only for local people.

The books listed as references by no means exhaust the available relevant titles. The subjects are dealt with in many other theosophical books, and people using this course may wish to consult other references to enrich their study. On the other hand, more references are given than you are expected to use. Do not feel overwhelmed. You may take the course without ever referring to another book or you may become interested enough that you want

to read further on the same subject as the chapter. Many people find it helpful to use at least one other book in conjunction with the study course in order to get a broader view of the subject for the chapter, but this is a matter of choice.

Throughout our literature students will come across references to "root races." Care should be taken not to confuse this subject with the ordinary use of the word "race." When this term was first used, there was an objection by the Founders of the Society and the Great Ones behind the founders. However it was agreed that there was no equivalent term in the English language for the concept in Tibetan or Sanskrit, and for the sake of consistency in terminology, it was reluctantly agreed to use the term. Keep in mind that in the theosophical philosophy, root races relate to phases of human development over millions of years, especially to the unfoldment of consciousness. Sometimes an ethnic connotation has crept into our literature, but H. P. Blavatsky makes it clear that the root races overlap and that we cannot judge people on the basis of their color or the ethnic group to which they belong. To do so would be against one of the fundamental principles of theosophy. The basic principle of the theosophical philosophy is that there is One Life, and brotherhood is a fact in nature. All outward distinctions are therefore only relative. It is important to keep this principle in mind in all studies of human evolution based on Occult Wisdom.

Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM

References for Supplementary Reading

The Ageless Wisdom of Life, Clara Codd, Chapter 1, pp. 1-4.

The Key to Theosophy, H. P. Blavatsky, An Abridgement edited by Joy Mills, pp. 4-8.

A Textbook of Theosophy, C. W. Leadbeater, Chapters 1 & 8.

The Axis and The Rim: A Modern Quest for Reality, Arthur W. Osborn.

Questions for Consideration

1. In your opinion, what is one of the basic problems that all people face? What is it that we are all seeking?

2. Why is it that modern science cannot adequately answer the question, "Does individual consciousness continue after death?"

3. Why does the author believe that the philosophies and religions of the world have failed to give man an understanding of the deeper truths of life?

4. What associations come to mind when you hear the word occult? What is the true meaning of the word occult?

5. What is the evidence that there actually is an Inner wisdom and that there are people who know this Inner Wisdom?

6. How can the ordinary person come to know the meaning and purpose of life for himself?

7. Can this Inner Wisdom be discovered simply by study?

Chapter 2

LINES OF INVESTIGATION

References for Supplementary Reading

The Meaning of Personal Existence, Arthur W. Osborn, Chapters 1-11.

The Transforming Mind, Laurence and Phoebe Bendit, Chapter 2, "The Reality of the Invisible."

Scientific Evidence of the Existence of the Soul, Benito F. Reyes.

Questions for Consideration

1. If there is a knowledge that explains the meaning and purpose of life, how may man come to know this knowledge? What methods would be used to learn this knowledge?

2. How can the study of "comparative religion" give insight into the Ancient Wisdom?

3. What evidence is there that the mystics who have lived through the ages have actually gained direct access to truth?

4. What does the information from psychical research indicate about the nature of man?

5. What is telepathic communication?

Chapter 3

THE BASIC IDEA OF ONE LIFE IN ALL THINGS

References for Supplementary Reading

The Fundamental Propositions of The Secret Doctrine, *A Pamphlet* by Virginia Hanson. Request it free from the Dept of Education.

Basic Theosophy, Geoffrey Hodson, Chapter 1, pp. 1-8.

God, Man and the Universe, I. K. Taimni, pp. 1-93.

A Textbook of Theosophy, C. W. Leadbeater, Chapter 2, pp. 9-17.

The Manifold and the One, Agnes Arber, Chapters 1-3.

The Key to Theosophy, H. P. Blavatsky, edited by Joy Mills, p. 50.

An Abridgement of The Secret Doctrine, H. P. Blavatsky, edited by Elizabeth Preston and Christmas Humphreys, pp. 3-17.

Questions for Consideration

1. What is the most fundamental principle of Occult Wisdom?
2. Why is it not possible for the mind of man to fully comprehend and understand the One Absolute Reality?
3. What is meant by the statement, "there is one life in all beings?" Explain in your own words your understanding of the One Life?
4. In the author's opinion, what is the essence of the mystic experience?
5. Explain what is meant by the statement "There is no lifeless matter."
6. What is the function or purpose of the deva or angelic kingdom in the One Life?

Chapter 4

THE BASIC IDEA OF THE DIFFERENT STATES OF MATTER

References for Supplementary Reading

First Book of Theosophy, P. Pavri.

A Way to Self Discovery, I. K. Taimni, pp. 18-29.

Man and His Bodies, Annie Besant.

The Seven Principles of Man, Annie Besant.

Basic Theosophy, Geoffrey Hodson, Chapters 1-6.

A Textbook of Theosophy, C. W. Leadbeater, Chapter 5, pp. 41-62.

The Key to Theosophy, edited by Joy Mills, pp. 50-59.

Space, Time, and Self, E. Norman Pearson, Section 4, pp. 85-104

Questions for Consideration

1. Explain what is meant by the statement, "Matter is an illusion." In What way is it and is it not an illusion?

2. What evidence is there that other cultures and religions have believed in superphysical worlds?

3. What are the seven planes of reality? What is meant by the word "plane?"

4. What is the etheric body or etheric double? What is the astral body? What is the meaning of the word "astral"? What is the mental body?

5. What is the aura?

6. What is a *chakra* and what is its relation to the inner "sheaths" of man?

Chapter 5

THE BASIC IDEA OF PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT

References for Supplementary Reading

The Ancient Wisdom, Annie Besant, pp. 321-342.

The Ageless Wisdom of Life, Clara Codd, Chapter 5, pp. 36-41.

A Textbook of Theosophy, C. W. Leadbeater, Chapter 4, pp. 28-40.

Ancient Wisdom—Modern Insight, Shirley Nicholson, Chapters 14-16.

The Secret Doctrine, HPB, Abridged by Preston & Humphreys, "Cosmogenesis" — Stanza 6.

Man: His Origins and Evolution, N. Sri Ram, Chapters 1 & 2.

Questions for Consideration

1. What is the biological viewpoint of evolution? What is the occult viewpoint of evolution?

2. Explain the meaning of the term "involution."

3. What is the difference between the evolution of *form* and the evolution of *consciousness?*

4. Explain the difference between the Christian and occult perspectives of evolution.

5. What is the practical value of the idea of progressive development in our daily lives and how can we practicably apply it?

Chapter 6

THE BASIC IDEA OF PERIODICITY OR CYCLES

References for Supplementary Reading

The Transforming Mind, Laurence and Phoebe Bendit, pp. 55-61.

A Study in Consciousness, Annie Besant, Chapters 7 & 8.

A Textbook of Theosophy, C. W. Leadbeater, Chapter 9, pp 121-133.

The Secret Doctrine, HPB, Abridged by Preston and Christmas Humphreys, pp. 4 and 129.

Basic Theosophy, Geoffrey Hodson, pp. 381-467.

Ancient Wisdom—Modern Insight, Shirley Nicholson, pp. 79-106.

Space, Time, and Self, E. Norman Pearson, Section V, Chapters 1 & 2.

This Dynamic Universe, Corona Trew and E. Lester Smith, Editors, 1983 edition, TPH, Chapter 8, pp. 66-74.

Questions for Consideration

1. List as many cycles of nature as you can.
2. Explain the idea of the spiritual evolution of the Universe.
3. What do the words *pralaya, manvantara,* mean?
4. Why are there no geological remains of the first and second root races?
5. What implication might one draw from the fact that the cycles of the planets, stars, and galaxies are in spirals and helixes rather than circles?

6. Explain in your own words the ideas of "rounds" and "root races." Can you think of a better word or phrase that has no negative associations and connotations? What is the relationship of rounds and root races to the plan of evolution?

Chapter 7

THE BASIC IDEA OF REINCARNATION

References for Supplementary Reading

The Ancient Wisdom, Annie Besant, pp. 197-267.

Reincarnation: An East West Anthology, Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston.

The Inner Life, C. W. Leadbeater, TPH, 1979, Section Eleven, pp. 332-350.

Reincarnation, Annie Besant.

Reincarnation, Fact or Fallacy, Geoffrey Hodson.

A Textbook of Theosophy, C. W. Leadbeater, Chapter 7, pp. 97-107.

The Meaning of Personal Existence, Arthur W. Osborn, Chapters 12, 13, 16, and 21.

Questions for Consideration

1. How would you explain the idea of reincarnation to someone who knew very little about it?

2. What is the purpose of reincarnation in the scheme of human evolution?

3. What evidence is there to support the idea of reincarnation?

4. How does reincarnation help to explain the differences we observe among people?

5. When and why does the human soul cease to reincarnate?

6. What evidence is there that reincarnation is a Christian Teaching?

Chapter 8

THE BASIC IDEA OF JUSTICE

References for Supplementary Reading

The Ancient Wisdom, Annie Besant, Chapter 9, pp. 267-302.

Karma, Annie Besant.

The Ageless Wisdom of Life, Clara Codd, Chapter 7, pp. 65-85.

The Key to Theosophy, HPB, Abridged by Joy Mills, pp. 120-133.

Basic Theosophy, Geoffrey Hodson, Chapter 9, pp. 191-215.

Space, Time and Self, E. Norman Pearson, Section V, Chapter 6, pp. 225-232.

First Book of Theosophy, P. Pavri, Chapter 5, pp. 106-136.

Questions for Consideration

1. Explain what is meant by the Law of Karma.

2. How does a belief in reincarnation and karma reconcile the apparent inconsistencies of earthly life with the principle of ultimate justice?

3. How does a person modify his or her karma? Do we have a right to change our karma?

4. What is the difference between karma and fate?

5. Would it be interfering with another's karma if we were to come to his aid and protect him from some harm? Give reasons for your answer.

6. Explain why all karma is "good karma."

Chapter 9

THE BASIC IDEA OF LIFE IN SUBTLE WORLDS

References for Supplementary Reading

First Book of Theosophy, P. Pavri, Chapter 6, pp. 137-171.

A Way to Self-Discovery, I. K. Taimni, pp. 45-192.

The Mirror of Life and Death, Laurence J. Bendit.

Death and After, Annie Besant.

The Ageless Wisdom of Life, Clara Codd, pp. 5-35.

Basic Theosophy, Geoffrey Hodson, Chapters 1-6 and 8.

Space, Time and Self, E. Norman Pearson, Section V, Chapter 5, pp. 208-224.

The Astral Plane, C. W. Leadbeater.

The Devachanic Plane, C. W. Leadbeater.

The Astral Body, A. E. Powell.

The Mental Body, A. E. Powell.

The Causal Body,, A. E. Powell.

Questions for Consideration

1. Explain what is meant by the statement, "When death ensues the man himself remains essentially the same."
2. Explain what happens to man after death in the astral and manasic worlds.
3. What factors determine the length of time that a human spends in devachan?

4. What is the role of the "Ego" in the course of human evolution?

5. Why do we not remember our past lives?

6. How can we help friends and loved ones who have passed on?

Chapter 10

THE BASIC IDEA OF THE GOAL OF LIFE

References for Supplementary Reading

First Book of Theosophy, P. Pavri, Chapter 8, pp. 199-223.

The Ageless Wisdom of Life, Clara Codd, Chapter 1, pp. 120-127.

The Ancient Wisdom, Annie Besant, Chapter 11, pp. 321-342.

A Textbook of Theosophy, C. W. Leadbeater, Chapter 8, pp. 108-120.

From the Outer Court to the Inner Sanctum, Annie Besant.

A Study in Consciousness, Annie Besant.

Ancient Wisdom—Modern Insight, Shirley Nicholson, Chapters 14-16, pp. 157-184.

Man: His Origins and Evolution, N. Sri Ram.

A Way to Self-Discovery, I. K. Taimni, Chapter 1, pp. 3-17.

Space, Time and Self, E. Norman Pearson, Section VI, Chapters 1 & 2, pp. 233-256.

Questions for Consideration

1. Why can we not know about the ultimate beginning and ending of the universe at our present stage of evolution?

2. Explain why the goal of life seems different for different individuals?

3. What is meant by the terms involution and evolution?

4. What are some of the names given by the religions of the world for the final goal of human evolution?

5. What is the goal of life as postulated by the Divine Wisdom?

6. According to the Inner Teaching, when is a person ready for the return path?

7. If human evolution is a fact, does the existence of perfected human beings seem logical to you? Why?

Chapter 11

THE BASIC IDEA OF THE BROTHERHOOD WHICH WATCHES OVER THE WORLD

References for Supplementary Reading

The Inner Life, C. W. Leadbeater, Section I, pp. 1-64.

First Book of Theosophy, P. Pavri, Chapter 9, pp. 224-254.

The Key to Theosophy, HPB, Abridged by Joy Mills, pp. 159-165.

Masters and Disciples, Clara Codd.

Masters and The Path, C. W. Leadbeater.

The Ageless Wisdom of Life, Clara Codd, Chapters 22 & 23, pp. 216-231.

Basic Theosophy, Geoffrey Hodson, Chapters 14 & 16, pp. 516-550.

The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett, Compiled by A. T. Barker.

A Way to Self-Discovery, I. K. Taimni, Chapter 26, pp. 297-304.

Masters and Men, Virginia Hanson.

Questions for Consideration

1. What is the difference between occultism and mysticism?
2. What is a Master and what is his work and function in the scheme of evolution?
3. What is the Occult Hierarchy and why have most people never heard of the idea of the Occult Hierarchy?
4. Explain the meaning of the term "Bodhisattva."

Chapter 12

THE BASIC IDEA OF THE OCCULT PATH

References for Supplementary Reading

The Way of the Disciple, Clara Codd.

At the Feet of the Master, J. Krishnamurti.

Light on the Path, Mabel Collins.

The Voice of the Silence, H. P. Blavatsky.

First Book of Theosophy, P. Pavri, Chapter 10, pp. 255-287.

The Path of Discipleship, Annie Besant.

Ancient Wisdom—Modern Insight, Shirley Nicholson, Chapters 14-16, pp. 157-184.

Basic Theosophy, Geoffrey Hodson, pp. 468-515.

The Pathway to Perfection, Geoffrey Hodson.

Space, Time and Self, E. Norman Pearson, Section VI, pp. 233-282.

Questions for Consideration

1. Why does a human being enter on the Path?
2. What is the difference between the normal path of evolution and the Path? What are some other names for the Occult Path?
3. Why is it said that the Path is so full of suffering and danger?
4. What qualifications are necessary to follow the Path?
5. What are some of the methods used to bring about a union between the higher self and the lower self?

6. Why is it said that a premature personal *search* for secret knowledge and occult powers is always dangerous?

7. What is the final goal of the Occult Path?